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Talking into Writing
Exercises for Basic Writers

Donald L. Rubin
William M. Dodd

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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ABSTRACT

Intended for college-level basic writers, this booklet integrates training in selected oral communication activities with writing instruction in order to improve students' academic writing. The first section discusses oral communication theory, emphasizing the underlying rhetorical abilities of invention, audience adaptation, and argumentation, to enhance group interaction in the writing classroom. The second half presents practical exercises to increase writing motivation, such as role switching, peer questioning, topic sculpting, and forensic discussion. This section concludes with an application of these exercises for use in content area writing (writing across the curriculum). (References and a selected bibliography are attached.) (NKA)

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A full instructor's manual for Project Synapse, containing student essays, writing mechanics modules, and additional materials for ESL students, is available from the ERIC Document and Reproduction Service (ED 267 455). A companion videotape illustrating the project is also available and may be ordered from the Instructional Resources Center, The University of Georgia, Athens, GA 30602.

Talking into Writing

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Exercises for Basic Writers

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IV

5

Contents

Foreword vii

I Theory and Research 1

II Practice 13

Role-Switching Activities 13

Peer-Questioning Activities 21

Topic-Sculpting Activities 38

Forensic-Discussion Activities 43

Writing across the Curriculum 51

References 55

Selected Bibliography 59

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Foreword

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system developed by the U.S. Department of Education and sponsored by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). ERIC provides ready access to descriptions of exemplary programs, research and development reports, and related information useful in developing effective educational programs.

Through its network of specialized centers or clearinghouses, each of which is responsible for a particular educational area, ERIC acquires, evaluates, abstracts, and indexes current information and lists that information in its reference publications.

The ERIC system has already made available—through the ERIC Document Reproduction Service—a considerable body of data, including all federally funded research reports since 1956. However, if the findings of educational research are to be used by teachers, much of the data must be translated into an essentially different context. Rather than resting at the point of making research reports readily accessible, OERI has directed the ERIC clearinghouses to commission authorities in various fields to write information analysis papers.

As with all federal educational information efforts, ERIC has as a primary goal bridging the gap between educational theory and classroom practice. One method of achieving that goal is the development by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills (ERIC/RCS) of a series of booklets designed to meet concrete educational needs. Each booklet provides teachers with a review of the best educational theory and research on a limited topic, followed by descriptions of classroom activities that will assist teachers in putting that theory into practice.

The idea is not unique. Several educational journals and many commercial textbooks offer similar aids. The ERIC/RCS booklets are, however, noteworthy in their sharp focus on educational needs and their pairing of sound academic theory with tested classroom practice. And they have been developed in response to the increasing number of requests from teachers to provide this kind of service.

Topics for these booklets are recommended by the ERIC/RCS National Advisory Board. Suggestions for topics are welcomed by the board and should be directed to the clearinghouse.

Charles Suhor
Director, ERIC/RCS

I Theory and Research

Amidst ever-deepening disappointment about college students' preparation in written communication, educators in recent years have focused particular attention on that population of students designated as "basic writers" (Shaughnessy 1977). While an increasingly diverse number of students is falling into this category, basic writers are often a product of open or special admissions standards. They are disproportionately members of minority cultures and language communities, disproportionately from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and disproportionately at risk of attrition from college. Basic writers lack the minimal degree of writing proficiency which enables learning in the various academic disciplines. All too often they end their collegiate careers where they began—in remedial writing laboratories.

For the most part, remediation programs for basic writers are remarkable for the persistence with which they adhere to instructional techniques of proven impotence. The most obvious features of basic writers' compositions are violations of the mechanical conventions of Standard Edited English. As a result, administrators, textbook publishers, and instructors alike often presume that such students require intensive drill in standard English patterns of grammar and usage. This drill most often takes the form of workbook exercises divorced from any realistic or motivating rhetorical context. Even when assignments do call upon basic writers to produce connected prose, the emphasis in evaluation and feedback generally centers on linguistic error. The mistaken premise underlying such instruction is that unless students first demonstrate competence in the atomistic, isolated, rote aspects of cultivated proofreading, they cannot handle molecular, purposeful, original composition.

To the contrary, decades of controlled research affirm that direct, didactic instruction in the technical description and analysis of grammar offers scant payoff in terms of quality of expression (Hartwell 1985; Holdzkom et al. 1982). Lessons in grammatical usage are often poorly learned and quickly forgotten. An undue emphasis on linguistic propriety can be antithetical to writing fluency and can undermine positive attitudes toward language. There appears, in any event, to

be little transfer between knowledge about language and skill in using language for effective communication. Frequently, basic writers derive some gratification from participating in grammar-book exercises because these activities offer concrete problems with tangible indicators of success. Fixations on this level of language awareness, however, may create dysfunctional mind-sets about what is important in drafting and revising (Perl 1979; Rose 1980); such fixation also robs valuable time-on-task from practice in using language communicatively. A more pedagogically sound approach to the problem of error in basic writers' compositions suggests that violations of editing conventions diminish when students are given writing assignments with genuine rhetorical aims (i.e., an audience, purpose, and topic of some importance [Wiener 1981]). Direct instruction in the conventions of writing mechanics can be kept in perspective by tailoring such lessons to students' individual needs, thus anchoring the instruction to writing that the students themselves have produced.

Social Cognitive Factors

The difficulties novice writers experience stem not so much from ignorance of writing conventions as from difficulty in coping with the rhetorical demands of written communication (Rubin and Kantor 1984). Basic writers experience difficulty in aspects of social perspective-taking—that is, in the ability to make inferences about their readers' thoughts, beliefs, and knowledge (Flasser and John-Steiner 1977; Lunsford 1979). Social perspective-taking is fundamental to writing proficiency because writers must view their compositions through the eyes of their readers (Kroll 1978; Rubin 1984). If they fail to do so, their writing takes on an egocentric, private quality rife with undeveloped observations, undersupported assertions, predicates isolated from subjects, and pronouns unconnected to antecedents. Thus, basic writers are apt to presume that readers will recover their intended meanings from vaguely or ambiguously coded passages (Flower 1979). Their revisions are typically limited to cosmetic transcriptional improvements since revision on a larger scale requires writers to suspend their own perspectives on their compositions, and adopt, instead, the perspective of a naive reader. Rubin and Rafoth (1986) showed that among college freshmen social cognitive ability contributes substantially to the quality of persuasive writing, though the contribution of social cognition is somewhat less for expository writing.

Social cognition or audience awareness in writing can be especially troublesome when the intended readers are psychologically remote

or ill-defined. This is the rhetorical difficulty inherent in the type of expository writing directed to a "general cultivated audience" which academic assignments generally presume. Basic writers, who may exhibit considerable sensitivity to their audiences in informal oral communication, often have no cognitive framework for adapting to this sort of readership, and their misguided efforts to do so result in sterile or—worse yet—awkwardly caricatured prose (Shaughnessy 1977).

Highlighting social cognition in this fashion as a core factor in understanding basic writing is consistent with recent analyses of adult intellectual development. In particular, the developmental scheme of William Perry (1970) has influenced thinking about developmental education and basic writing (Bizzell 1986). Shapiro (1985) and Hayes and Brandt (1987), for example, have shown that student development along the Perry scale is a strong determinant of writing quality. Perry sketches nine stages through which many students may be expected to pass during their college years. Throughout this course of development, students become increasingly more able to juggle and reconcile divergent perspectives on an issue. At the same time, they acquire an increasingly sophisticated system for construing what it means for an individual to exercise volition in accepting social conventions or in making a commitment to a point of view. The underlying faculty governing these aspects of adult development is the ability to perceive and synthesize the perspectives of others—that is, social cognition.

Oral-based Culture

Basic writers belonging to nonmainstream oral-based cultures may be further disadvantaged with respect to writing proficiency. Considerable controversy attends the question of nonstandard-dialect interference in written language. While even experienced teachers impressionistically report dialect intrusions in writing, the bulk of the research literature bearing on this subject indicates that nonstandard-dialect speakers do not write as they speak. Errors committed by nonstandard-dialect speakers are not very different in kind or frequency from those committed by standard-dialect speakers, and the dialect-related writing miscues that do appear typically involve superficial features which are not highly stigmatized (Hartwell 1980; Rubin 1979 [but for a well-reasoned opposing view, see Epes 1985]). Farr and Daniels (1986) also claim some significant linguistic differences due to interference by oral dialect in writing. The instructional approach they advocate is nevertheless quite consistent with the approach of this volume. Teachers cannot reliably distinguish the writing of

nonstandard-dialect speakers from that of their standard-dialect counterparts. However, when teachers think that a particular essay is written by a minority-group student, they are likely to assign it a poor grade (Piché et al. 1978).

Despite the weight of these empirical findings, a number of institutions have established special writing programs for nonstandard-dialect speakers. Such programs are linguistically based and focus on contrastive analyses of community speech patterns and Standard Edited English patterns. The oral communication exercises described in this book, however, differ sharply from the linguistic-drill approach. In the activities presented here, students do not engage in oral grammar drills in the hope that such exercises might reduce transcriptional errors. Rather, these activities help reduce transcriptional errors as a result of more rhetorically based oral practice.

The issue of nonstandard dialect aside, writers who rely on oral modes of interaction can experience problems in adapting to a literate style of communication. Of course, postulating an absolute dichotomy between oral and literate cultures distorts what is a far more complex phenomenon (Tannen 1985). Nevertheless, it is useful to think of some groups of individuals as being socialized into thinking about language as an entity unto itself, whereas members of other social groups are less likely to regard linguistic texts independently of the social actions in which that language is embedded. Invoking these notions of oral-based and literate-based culture reminds us that academic writing presumes allegiance to a particular discourse community—a community that holds certain norms of reference, allusion, syntax, and argument no less distinctive and no less a matter of social convention than any other community of language users (Bizzell 1986).

Oral-based cultures favor a communication style which presupposes that all listeners will be "insiders" (Tannen 1982). Hence, members of oral-based cultures often employ formulaic expressions which imply a great deal more significance than they explicitly encode (e.g., "I could've died!"). By the same token, messages in oral-based cultures often leave their premises, conclusions, or extensions unstated, since these would be well understood by members of the culture (e.g., "And can you believe it, he actually went to the dance in blue jeans!").

The communication style prevalent in oral-based cultures doesn't work for the kind of written communication that has been characterized as "essayist literacy," of which academic prose is the prototypical instance (Scollon and Scollon 1981). Although all messages are to some extent tied to a cultural, temporal, or physical context, writing demands relatively autonomous messages which are explicitly encoded so that

they can be understood independently of particular communicative situations (Olson and Torrance 1981). Members of oral-based cultures may be less adept at anticipating and accommodating the needs of readers who do not share their immediate physical and social context and who cannot provide an ongoing flow of feedback. As a result, their writing often manifests problems in maintaining cohesion over long stretches of discourse, in sustaining topic-centered patterns of expository development, in producing well-formed arguments, or in constructing explicit transitions from one point to another.

Rhetorical Invention in Writing

In addition to seemingly egocentric writing and a reliance on oral modes of communication, novice writers are frequently plagued by the related syndrome of simply not knowing how to expand and, concomitantly, how to focus their ideas in writing. Without a conversational partner to probe and to encourage them, basic writers very often state a thesis in general terms and then move on to a new point, or else just terminate their compositions (Stotsky 1986). They neglect to adequately elaborate or support their assertions. They fail to formulate a discernible point of view, a direction (Flower 1981).

Basic writers' powers of rhetorical invention are weak (at least in regard to writing), and invention is a central component in writing. Our understandings of composing processes indicate that writing serves not only as a vehicle for communicating preformed ideas, but also as a tool for the discovery of new insights (Murray 1978). If basic writers are unable to exploit the function of writing as an instrument for inquiry and learning, then their entire academic careers are placed in further jeopardy. And yet, many basic writers become so mired in relatively peripheral concerns of premature copyediting and conforming to some stereotyped expectation of "what the teacher wants" that they fail to devote productive energy to generating original, directed, and well-conceived thought in their writing.

Some Contributions of Oral Communication Instruction to Writing Proficiency

It is a mistake to presume that writing is simply speech transcribed. As stated above, when inexperienced writers overgeneralize oral modes of interaction to written communication, the intelligibility of their composition suffers. At the same time, it is clear that many basic writers

have achieved considerable proficiency in many forms of oral discourse, and that they are generally more comfortable in casual speech than in formal writing. (This is not to say, however, that such students don't benefit from instruction in oral communication for its own sake. Quite to the contrary, classwork that cultivates speaking and listening—particularly classwork that extends students' control over a wider range of oral communication situations—can be of great advantage.) Identifying the ways in which oral competencies can serve as a foundation for writing is a promising direction for promoting the writing skills of basic writers (Gwin 1981). Indeed, a number of successful basic writing programs deliberately exploit such techniques as collaborative writing, peer editing, and student-teacher conferences—techniques which capitalize on students' talk (e.g., Rouse 1985). Rhetoric programs with a combined oral and written emphasis (e.g., Katula, Martin, and Schwegler 1983; Rafoth, in press) are profitable alternatives to traditional English composition classes for nonremedial writers as well.

Talk promotes writing proficiency in a number of ways. As an *accompaniment* at any of the several stages of composing, oral communication stimulates invention of new ideas or facilitates evaluation and revision of text already produced. Successful instructors have long depended upon unstructured classroom discussions and, more recently, upon structured oral activities such as role playing as techniques for assisting students in coming to grips with their writing topics, in finding their stance. Wagner (1987), for example, showed that middle-grade students write more sophisticated persuasive messages when they first have an opportunity to role-play their intended audience. At various points in drafting or revising, writers can obtain feedback from the reader's point of view by conferring with instructors or meeting with peer-editing groups. It can also be helpful for students to simply read their compositions aloud. In speaking and hearing their own writing, students are often able to monitor their language with a fresh "eye."

As an *adjunct* to writing, several oral communication methods provide the scaffolding that some students need to make the difficult transition from jointly constructed dialogue to individually managed extended monologue. Zoellner (1969) claims that talk can reinforce the behavior of writing, and his Talk-Write technique accordingly incorporates peer dialogue into the process of drafting. The Story Workshop method (Schultz 1982) asks students to capitalize upon similarities between familiar forms of speech and less familiar written formats. Students move between oral and written discourse. Dialogue

journal writing (Staton 1984) is a transitional form between spoken dialogue and written monologue. Students conduct a written interaction with their instructors, and the instructors' "conversational turns" can encourage the students to produce increasingly autonomous writing.

Finally, oral communication may serve as a *calisthenic* for enhancing the development of the cognitive abilities underlying writing proficiency. As a cognitive calisthenic, an oral activity is used repeatedly in a structured regimen designed to advance insights into such matters as organization, factual support, and audience awareness. Like the exercises that athletes perform to condition themselves for sport, these cognitive exercises help develop cognitive abilities. But they are not the game itself. They will not substitute for regular and frequent writing practice.

Such activities need not accompany writing assignments, though sometimes their importance to the development of writing skills is clearer to students when they are presented in conjunction with writing exercises. In this vein, Blankenship and Stelzner (1979) emphasize the role of oral activities for inculcating a sense of formal argumentation and patterns of rhetorical development. Oral communication instruction can also enhance the social cognitive skills necessary for effective audience adaptation in writing. Chandler (1973), for example, describes a program in which students participated in a series of role-playing activities in which each individual systematically cycled through all the perspectives in a set of dramatic improvisations. After experiencing these multiple perspectives, students had an opportunity to reflect on the manner in which perceptions about a single event can differ. At the close of the program, the participants displayed measurable behavioral and social-cognitive growth.

The Role of Oral Communication Activities in Developmental Curricula

Effective curricula are more than the sums of their parts. While the most visible aspect of a curriculum is the set of activities and exercises in which students participate, an effective curriculum is a more encompassing approach to teaching and learning. Classroom activities are only illustrative of that overarching approach. Less tangible, but equally as important, are the modes of thinking imparted to students, the ways in which teachers interact with students, and the attitudes toward learning and subject matter which the classroom climate engen-

ders. The specific exercises devised for classroom use serve only as framing devices for implementing more general principles of the composition curriculum, among which are the following:

1. Generating ideas and being aware of one's audience are at the core of communication; facility in using language follows from these processes.
2. Talking and writing, though they constitute different codes, are mutually supportive; both entail the exercise of rhetorical skills.
3. Academic discourse requires distancing from immediate, impulsive reactions. It further requires elaboration beyond the semantically abbreviated style with which we are accustomed to communicating with ourselves and with intimates. At the same time, meaningful discourse of any kind requires personal commitment; the writer or speaker must experience a sense of ownership. Learning experiences that are at once active and structured can synthesize these contrasting requirements.
4. Learners who lack experience in modes of academic thinking and expression can attain proficiency by building on cognitive and rhetorical skills which they already possess. For many students, structured oral communication activities can lead to the analytical and elaborated discourse that is characteristic of academic writing.
5. In acquiring new ways of thinking and expressing, students make gradual progress. The value of classroom activities lies in their calisthenic function rather than in any magical algorithm for accomplishing specific classroom assignments. This is the spirit of developmental education.

Table 1 enumerates the roles of various oral-based activities in composition instruction. The selected skills that appear in the chart are especially critical to the kind of essayist literacy that most academic writing demands.

Table 1, being only two-dimensional and static, oversimplifies what it is intended to explicate. The types of skills listed, for one thing, are not mutually exclusive. To the contrary, they are highly interdependent. For example, audience awareness can be one force that directs a writer's invention of subject matter, and being able to monitor one's writing can induce a writer to consider more carefully how a particular composition meshes in collaboration with other works on the same topic. By the same token, several of the oral-based activities can be used to direct student development in any of the skill dimensions. Student-teacher conferences, for example, can focus a student's atten-

Table 1
Oral-Based Activities in Composition Instruction

Skill Domain	Accompanying Composing Processes	Adjuncts to Composing	Cognitive Calisthenics
Audience Awareness—anticipating and adapting to the responses of readers with diverse backgrounds and to their informational and language-processing needs	helping circles, oral "publication," student-teacher conferences	"talk-write" dyads, audience interviews	*role switching*, discussing moral dilemmas
Cooperative Discourse—building upon what's been said before, both in interacting with a particular audience and within a broader cultural context; being relevant; making a contribution; acknowledging sources	group work in dividing a topic, group reports	collaborative drafting, group revising	instruction in listening, *peer questioning* as a tool for learning how to internalize dialogue
Invention—discovering subject matter, elaborating, forging topical coherence	prewriting discussion, interviewing as an information-gathering tool	tape-recording notes, dictating "zero drafts"	*topic-sculpting impromptus*, forum questioning
Monitoring—metacognitive awareness, reflecting on and distancing oneself from one's own discourse, adopting a critical stance	reading aloud to facilitate editing, group critiques	thinking-aloud composing, discourse-based interviews for self-assessment	structured *forensic discussion*, transcribing speech

tion upon invention as readily as upon audience response, and peer questioning (depending on how it is designed) can promote audience awareness of invention as readily as it can encourage collaborativeness in discourse.

In the "Practice" section that follows, we concentrate on oral activities that serve primarily as cognitive calisthenics. The four types of exercises presented—role switching, peer questioning, topic sculpting, and forensic discussion—clearly do not themselves comprise a composition curriculum for basic writers. Rather, they are a representative sampling of a certain kind of oral activity that can serve important functions in composition classes—bridging the gap between oral and written competence, and enhancing both.

Implementing a Program of Oral Communication Exercises

The speech exercises offered here have been used in a variety of settings, including developmental writing classes at a large state university. They work well with other students, too. They have been used successfully at a traditionally black public college at which student attrition is extremely high due in large part to high failure rates on a statewide writing test required for graduation. The exercises have also proved effective at a college that serves students who come primarily from a working-class background, about half of whom gain college admissions through developmental studies. And the exercises have also been integrated into intensive ESL classes that include a strong listening/speaking component. Further, the materials have been presented to high school teachers at numerous workshops, and they report that the exercises can be used with their students to some considerable benefit.

Using the exercises with a variety of students has allowed for a great deal of fine tuning. We have encountered or anticipated many problems, and changes have been made and suggestions given which, we hope, will simplify the lives of the teachers who use the activities. Still, instructors should be aware that they may need to vary the exercises to fit their particular environments.

Each activity involves students engaging in interpersonal interaction. Having students work in small groups of five or fewer is no new teaching strategy. Indeed, in the past several years, many researchers and practitioners have studied and used student group activities as an aid to effective learning in the classroom. The results of this kind of teaching tactic are remarkably consistent: small-group interaction is productive and rewarding for the students as well as for the teacher.

One powerful feature of group interaction is that it transcends any curricular boundaries; it is one of the few teaching strategies that can readily be used across the curriculum. From students in a history class who may work in pairs finding answers to essay questions, to various research teams (math competitions, academic bowls, or lab "unknown experiment" sessions), to English teachers who use students in groups for peer editing of compositions and grammar-check sessions, the students in these smaller work arrangements are better able to share, discuss, and explore their reactions, thoughts, and understandings of various topics. A group of three to five students working together better allows for all students to contribute—even those less vocal students who may not always get their answers and opinions heard in the larger classroom.

Unfortunately, parceling the students of the larger class into smaller work units doesn't succeed automatically. Sometimes because of individual personality differences among the group members, conflicting approaches to the task at hand, or any of a multitude of other concerns, groups may not interact as harmoniously and as productively as teachers wish them to operate. George (1984) discusses three types of groups that usually come about when students are put into small units: (1) "task-oriented" groups, which are self-starting and continuing; (2) "leaderless" groups, which often follow the ideas and interpretations of any dominant spokesperson in the group; and (3) "dysfunctional" groups, which resist any kind of group interaction. Having either the second or third type of group in a class can bring any activity to a grinding halt or cause that activity to go far less smoothly than teachers want it to run. This situation poses a serious problem in a composition class that is using oral communication activities. The premise of these activities is that the students will talk about, discuss, and explore ideas with each other before they write. Hence, the teacher needs to pay attention to the instructions accompanying each speech exercise on how these groups should operate and what to do if they at first don't work as well as expected.

Instructors embarking on the use of any of the oral communication activities might achieve better results if the following points are considered before parceling off the members of a class into small work units:

1. Establish early a receptive atmosphere—one that will allow students to be both encouraging and respectful in their dealings with each other.
2. Consider the personalities of students placed in the various groups, perhaps giving careful thought to distributing the very

vocal students among groups. Nor should very aggressive and very reserved students be placed together if there is the possibility of "silent" conflict.

3. Work out (with the students' assistance) a checklist of behaviors that are considered acceptable and unacceptable in a group.
4. Videotape the students as they work in their groups. Then, in a positive, helping manner, single out those behaviors (not students) that are productive and counterproductive.

Ultimately, group work is rewarding for both the instructor and the students. Students initiate their own learning rather than passively submitting to fragmented exercises or having instructors lead them in step-by-step instruction. Teachers who suggest rather than dominate group interaction find that students learn to master the dynamics of small group work. These students ultimately are more confident learners who respond well to speaking and writing activities. Group work, then, is an aid to more effective learning for both students and teachers.

II Practice

Role-Switching Activities

In role-switching activities, students improvise conflict situations in groups of four. The students cycle through the four roles in each situation so that each student will have experience enacting each perspective of the conflict. After each student has enacted each role, a group discussion focuses on new and, it is hoped, more objective insights about different perspectives on the same situation. The discussion leads to writing assignments in which students have an opportunity to write from a point of view that reconciles the various perspectives.

Logistics

For each scenario, students are divided into groups of four. Each student receives a role card. (Role cards are simply index cards on which have been typed or written the role of one of the participants in a role-playing scenario. Examples of such scenarios are provided on pp. 19–20. The role cards may state, in addition to the role, an opening line of dialogue to aid the student in initiating the role play. The sample scenarios are intended as guidelines for the instructor's own creation of further roles and scenarios.) The instructor reads the statement of the moral dilemma and describes the scene or setting. The students then improvise a dialogue, working until they resolve the problem or until the instructor feels they have done an adequate job. With little pause, students pass their role cards to the left and improvise another round. This procedure continues until all students have had an opportunity to enact each role.

After the role-playing activity is completed, a brief discussion ensues either in the small groups or among the entire class. Students are encouraged to reflect on how they felt in each role, on the differences and similarities among the viewpoints, and on how each role-character would likely have felt at the conclusion of the discussion. Finally, the instructor assigns a writing exercise (either formal or informal) which

asks the students to discuss the problem from a more general and abstract stance.

Rationale for Students

The exercises suggested here will probably be different from anything the students have done before in a language arts class, and this fact can cause problems. Many students are convinced that "learning grammar" is what they need to improve their writing, and they may see the role-switching activities as a waste of their valuable time—time taken from grammar drill. The following is a possible rationale to be presented to the class:

> In order to write effectively, we need to see a situation from all angles, not just from the first one that occurs to us. We need to consider and deal with alternative ways of solving problems. Equally as important, we need to be able to view our own compositions from the perspectives of our readers. We don't want to be locked into just our own perspectives on our writing, because we often understand an idea in our own heads but fail to see that we haven't helped our readers understand that idea in *their* heads. In other words, we need to see our writing from fresh eyes, from the eyes of our readers, who are naive about or ignorant of what we had intended to say. These role-switching activities will build skills necessary for seeing many perspectives on a situation or on a piece of writing. Don't worry about the fact that we will be repeating the role-plays. We are all individuals, and as we assume each new role, we will bring our own ideas and personalities to it.

Suggestions for Classroom Use

1. *Model the process.* At first, many of the students may feel insecure about what they are expected to do. The best way to help them overcome their fears is to let them see how the process should work. Grab a student or two, ones you know are verbal by nature, and model the exercises. Of course, the students you have "elected" to help you probably won't know what you expect either. A good way to start, then, is to choose a role for yourself and assign roles to the students. Begin by asking them what their characters might say in response to dialogue you create spontaneously. By playing "What if I say . . ." several times, the students will begin to get the point. Also let them create dialogue themselves and put you on the spot for a response. The other students will feel more secure about their ability to think of something to say if they see their peers succeeding. Admittedly, you run the risk of "contaminating" the process with your ideas if you give the students this kind of direction, but that

is a chance you have to take. The students are bound to benefit more from even a slightly contaminated experience than they will from ten minutes of anxiety-producing silence as they try to figure out what they are supposed to be saying. Besides, after they have seen how the exercises work the first time, they will require little or no modeling for subsequent exercises. (Still, though, you shouldn't be afraid to do as much demonstration as necessary.)

Sometimes students just cannot relate to a scenario, and it will require work on your part to make the role-play successful. In other instances, students may have trouble with only one of the roles. In such a case, assume the difficult role yourself and choose a group of students to play the other roles; show them how that person *might* think, attempting to be as general about the individual's behaviors as possible. Leave it to the students to flesh out the particulars of the role during the session.

2. *Vary the groups to get people talking, and to keep them talking.* The major obstacle to using role switching is dealing with the "leaderless" group. George (1984) defines the leaderless group as composed of students who will follow or subscribe to the ideas and interpretations of any dominant spokesperson in the group regardless of that person's interpretations.

   Invariably, there will be students in your class who will be willing to let the other members of the group do all the talking, either because they simply don't want to participate or because they are by nature shy and withdrawn. Regardless of the cause, these students can't benefit from the exercises unless they participate in them. While students who experience true communication apprehension shouldn't be put on the spot and forced to speak up, there are several ways to gently draw students into interaction. First, you can structure your groups so that you deal with the problem from the beginning. A less verbal student should never be grouped with three highly verbal students; you're asking for trouble if you place reticent students in such groups. Sometimes the reticent students will feel less intimidated by each other than by the more verbal students and when grouped together will draw each other out. Another way of helping the less talkative students get started is by pulling aside some of the more verbal students and soliciting their help. They can bring a quiet student into the conversation by addressing their character's remarks to the character or role being assumed by the reticent student. Along the same lines, you can often cure two problems at the same time by expanding this role into one of "group moderator." In this case, one student is charged with the

responsibilities of getting students who are not participating involved and keeping the dialogue rolling without long pauses. This job is a good one for the student who is "goofing off," laying back and letting the rest of the group do all the work. It gets *all* of the students involved!

Even after you get everyone talking, there are other problems to be handled. The first time the roles are played, things will move smoothly; but by the time the roles have been switched three or four times, students simply run out of things to say or begin to repeat what they've already said. One way around this problem is to monitor the groups closely and not let one role session go on too long. Students shouldn't be allowed to resolve the dilemma the first time the scenario is enacted. Stop them and make them switch roles; then they can pick up where they left off. Another way to handle the problem is to vary the roles slightly. By modifying one of the roles in a scenario slightly during one of the turns, you can often elicit new information. For instance, most students "gang up" on the student who cheated on a test in the scenario about cheating (Sample Scenario #1); however, if you add a twist to the role, such as the student's need for a passing grade to insure admittance to nursing school, the students will begin to see some of the grey areas associated with ethical decisions, and, most importantly, they will continue to talk.

3. *Make sure the group discussion that follows the role-switching activities is an integral part of the exercises.* The follow-up group discussion can provide you with valuable information about the students and about the activities themselves, and it can also serve as a teaching tool. During the group discussion, allow the students to analyze the roles they have portrayed. Listen to what they found easy or difficult about playing the roles. Solicit their help in adding to the scenarios. Are there roles that need to be added? Do some of the roles need altering? Are the dilemmas realistic and comprehensible? Allowing your students this kind of freedom will often make them more eager to be involved in the activities in the future, and their suggestions will help you fine-tune the exercises. The group discussion can also complement the role-switching exercises if it is designed in such a way that it emphasizes dealing with an increasing number of differing perspectives. Such an approach aids in what Moffett (1968) has called decentering, that is, becoming less and less egocentric.

One way of implementing such an approach is to begin the group discussion by having it actually occur in small groups within the

class, with perhaps two groups of four students merging to share their ideas. Beginning with smaller groups makes sense for several reasons. First, it doesn't ask the students to move completely out of their subjective views and see a situation from the perspective of everyone in the class. Second, because it doesn't ask students to do too much too soon, it is less threatening and more likely to make the group discussion a successful part of the activities. A useful interim step between small-group discussions and whole-class discussion may be the use of a group spokesperson to relay the small group's thinking to other groups. If the spokesperson is changed each time, everyone in the group gets a chance to experience dealing with a somewhat larger audience, but without being "out there" alone; yet, the ideas being conveyed are still *group* ideas, not purely personal ones. The final step in this process, obviously, is to make the students comfortable expressing their own ideas to the class at large and to make them willing to hear and respect others' perspectives.

Whether you are working with students in small groups, in small groups with a spokesperson, or in the class as a whole, you should always be conscious of the purpose of the discussion. Use the group interaction to focus on the different perspectives that emerged in the role-switching activities; emphasize the *newness* that came out. Allow the students time to flesh out a role, accepting any comments which provide a perspective on the character involved in the scenario. If used well, the group discussion can sum up what has been enacted in the groups and be a stimulus for yet a whole new perspective based on all of the ideas that emerged. Finally, if you are sensitive to what goes on in the group discussion, you can pick up some good ideas for writing assignments to follow up the activities. Many times, the groups will interpret roles differently and debates will emerge. Such situations lend themselves to good writing topics, ones that encourage students to resolve on paper what they have discovered through the oral language exercises.

4. *Be flexible in your use of the follow-up writing assignments.* The role-switching scenarios are designed to be accompanied by writing assignments, but you will quickly learn that the students are not always "up to" the topics you suggest. And that's fine. The purpose of the exercises is to help students decenter, to see situations from many perspectives and to abstract meaning from that experience; however, the experience itself is the most important aspect. The students will benefit from the enactments of the roles, even if a formal written assignment doesn't follow. Sometimes, just enacting the roles re-

quires the students to do things that are so alien to them that they can't go yet another step in the writing; sometimes they can only "rehash" what happened during the role enactments. Accept such an effort, particularly at first.

Remember that there are endless alternatives to formal writing assignments. For instance, you can gauge the effectiveness of the role-switching activities by asking the students to do a pre-activity free-write about their views of the chosen topic. The follow-up writing assignment, then, can be a post-activity free-write, recorded in a journal for your perusal. As students become more comfortable with this format, the exercises can easily be formalized somewhat by having them write a position essay before they enact the scenarios. After the activities, they can be assigned a closely related essay topic for their post-activity essay. Another way to vary the writing exercises so that the students benefit the most is to *listen to the groups;* let your assignment grow out of the direction the discussion is taking. If the students have zeroed in on a key question which they are hotly contesting, let that question become their essay topic.

Finally, the role-switching activities were originally created to develop students' skills in writing persuasive essays. But their usefulness is certainly not limited to such essays. Scenarios can lend themselves to several other modes of discourse—narration, description, exposition--and to several different methods of development, such as comparison/contrast and classification/division. For example, after participating in Sample Scenario #1, the students might benefit from an essay comparing cheating in school to cheating at games, or contrasting the definition of cheating as it applies to school and the definition of cheating as it applies to a boyfriend or girlfriend. All the essential issues are still there, and the students will learn from manipulating them. So don't feel locked into the persuasive essay; experiment with what's best for *your* students in *your* situation.

Sample Role-Switching Scenario #1

Dilemma: What should we do about cheating that hurts others?

Scene: Group of students looking at test scores posted near classroom

Good Student

I worked hard studying for that exam, and I deserve my "A." I know that a lot of other students cheat. Maybe someone even copied off of my paper.

Cheater

I didn't have time to study for the test. Sure, I copied off the paper of the best student in class. I couldn't afford to fail this test; I might lose my scholarship.

Student Who Failed

I failed that test by just a few points. If the class average had been just a few points lower, I would have passed. Probably it was the cheaters that hurt me; if they hadn't raked up the points by copying answers, my score wouldn't have been too bad.

Cheater's Friend

I know that my friend cheated. I saw him/her copying off that good student's paper. And I know that my friend's cheating caused some other students to flunk. I don't think that cheating is right, but can I really turn in my own friend?

Sample Role-Switching Scenario #2

Dilemma: Jack Spence, a sophomore at the university majoring in computer science, plans to work for a large firm when he graduates. However, yesterday, he was offered a job with Textron Corporation that pays a beginning salary of $26,000. Because Jack is a bright student, the Textron representative says that he can "learn the ropes" as he works for them. Should Jack drop out of college to take the job?

Setting: The study room of Russell Hall, Jack's dorm

Jack

Man, this money is great, and Textron is just the kind of company I'd like to work for. But I just don't know what to do.

Jack's Dad

Son, this is a marvelous opportunity. Think of what this means to your future. Also, now your mom and I can begin to get back some return on all those years of investing in your education.

Ted, Jack's Roommate

Hey, roomie, you'd be a fool not to take the job. Take the money and run. Think of that new stereo you wanted.

Jack's Academic Advisor

But Mr. Spence, your son needs to stay in school and finish his degree. He'll surely regret not finishing school.

Carla, the Textron Representative

But you don't understand. Jack will be able to finish his schooling if he wants to. However, our on-the-job training is so good that he may not want to.

Sample Role-Switching Scenario #3

Dilemma: Should the drinking age be raised?

Scene: Seated in bleachers, waiting for Braves game to begin

18-Year-Old College Student

If I'm old enough to be drafted, to vote, or to be married, then why shouldn't I have the privilege of drinking? I can go out and die for my country, but I can't drink.

Bar Owner

They've already hurt my business enough by raising the drinking age from eighteen to nineteen. If they raise it again, I don't know what could happen. It's just a small business, and college students are my biggest customers.

Mother of College Student

Kids today just want to party all the time, and they don't think about the consequences involved. My sister's child was hit by a college student on his way home from a party. I don't want to see that happen to my child.

Physician

Alcohol is a dangerous drug. I have treated too many young people who have abused it, or who have been injured because others have abused it.

Sample Role-Switching Scenario #4

Dilemma: Stealing life-saving drugs

Scene: Robber has just been caught stealing drugs from a pharmacy.

Robber

I've never stolen anything in my whole life. I feel bad, but I was forced to steal this medicine. My wife is dying, and I lost my job because I've been staying home to take care of her. There just wasn't any other way to get the medicine my wife needs.

Pharmacist

Stealing in our pharmacy has really gotten out of hand lately. Theft is very costly for our business. Besides, an untrained person might end up taking a dangerous drug.

Paying Customer

It really makes me mad when people steal. That's what makes prices soar. I work hard for my money. It's only fair that they should pay for things just as I do.

Clergyperson

Stealing is wrong. But it is also wrong to let a person suffer. We should be charitable toward those who are less fortunate than we.

Peer-Questioning Activities

In the peer-questioning activities, students are paired in a prewriting activity to help each other discover what information they want to include in a piece of writing. The students take turns asking each other a series of structured questions they have before them. After both students have had a turn in the role of both questioner and writer, they separate to produce a draft of the writing assignment.

Logistics

One student in each pair serves as the questioner and aids the other student, the responder, in (1) coming up with an idea for the piece of writing, (2) establishing major premises to include in the thesis statement, (3) unifying the topic, and (4) choosing minor support for the major premises. (Note that one common variation of this exercise is to add a third role, that of recorder.) The students are provided with a set of questioning cards (see Peer-Questioning Cards—Set 1 on p. 26), which guides them through the questioning process. The questioner begins with the first card only if the assignment has not been determined by the instructor. If the instructor has assigned a specific topic, such as an attack or defense of abortion or capital punishment, the questioner skips the cards designed to aid in discovering a topic and begins with the questions that lead the writer to think about audiences. If the instructor has specified the full rhetorical context, the student begins with the questions pertaining to major premises. The deck of question cards can be entered at any point, but the most important questions are the latter ones dealing with detail and forms of support. This is the section in which students need to invest the majority of their time and effort. The students cycle through the cards, repeating the questions or inventing new ones as needed, until they feel confident that they have taken notes on all the information needed to complete the writing assignment.

After the first person has fleshed out the topic sufficiently, the students switch roles; the questioner now becomes the responder, and the students repeat the entire process. When the process is completed the second time, they may separate to write a first draft. At this point, the instructor may wish to have the students repeat the peer-questioning exercise using the cards from Set 2 (pp. 33–37), particularly if the students still feel unsure about the writing assignment.

Directions for Students

Students are likely to feel insecure about the activity unless they understand completely what is expected of them. The following directions will make the peer-questioning activity work more smoothly:

Purpose: As a questioner, your goal is to find out what your partner means as specifically as possible. This task can be difficult because sometimes even your partner isn't sure what he or she means. For example, suppose your partner says, "I like flowers." You'll want to ask, "What kinds of flowers?" "What aspects of flowers?" "How strongly do you feel about flowers?" "Can you compare your feelings about flowers to your feelings about something else?" In this way, you will help your partner write with more detail and greater clarity.

Procedure: Feel free to ask your own questions. In fact, the best questions are those that you make up because you perceive a need for more information. The questions provided in Set 1 of the Question Cards, however, may give you a starting point. Feel free to skip around among these questions, or ask some of them more than once. For example, if your partner decides to write about cars and stereo systems as two types of campus status symbols, you might ask for illustrations or statistics for both of these subtopics. Try to work through the first questions in the set as quickly as possible. These questions will help your partner narrow his or her topic and come up with the major premises (main points) for his or her paper. It is important to get into the minor-support questions, which ask for specific details, as quickly as possible.

Turning questions into writing: Encourage your partner to take notes. You might say, "Why don't you write that down so you'll be sure to include it when you draft your paper?" On the other hand, your job is *not* to write the paper for your partner. You are helping your partner to discover and sharpen ideas so that a reader will understand what your partner has to say.

When you and your partner are satisfied that your partner's topic is well-developed, it's time to change roles. Your partner will now ask you questions to help you get ready to write. Once you and your partner are off writing by yourselves, you may turn to each other for additional questioning at any time you think it is needed. You may feel blocked or uncertain about what to write next. If that happens, your partner can run through a few questions that will help you get back on track.

Drafting and revising: Set 2 of the Question Cards is designed to help you write a first draft of your paper or to help you revise the

first draft you have already written. Since this activity is designed to focus your attention on your written product, you should work through the questions in the numbered order. This time, use only the questions in the deck. Sticking to the questions provided will alert you to problems of organization, specificity, and faulty logic.

Suggestions for Classroom Use

1. *Model the process.* As with the role-switching activities, the students are likely to be confused about what they are supposed to do the first time. You can alleviate their fears by placing yourself in the role of questioner and leading a student partner through the process. By allowing the students to see how the activity *should* work, you can handle some of the inevitable problems ahead of time. Many times the students who are in the role of writer get so busy responding to the questions or defending a position that notetaking is minimal. You need to emphasize the importance of notetaking when you model the activity, and frequently remind the students to take notes as they use the activity. Another problem that can be solved by modeling is the writer's being led or pushed by the questioner to take a certain position. The purpose of the peer-questioning activity is to help the students in the role of writer discover what *they* think about a topic. If the questioners are too aggressive or opinionated during the activity, the writers may give up their positions and adopt the questioners' positions. Writers don't learn much if this dominance occurs. Good modeling of the process can insure that the writers benefit from the activity.
2. *Vary the pairings.* Some students are just more verbal than others, and it's a bad idea to always pair a verbal, "take-control" type with a student who is verbally shy. Shy students learn little in the role of responder (other than the questioners' opinions), and verbal students learn little in the role of responder if the shy students are intimidated in the role of questioner. Another reason to vary the pairs is to improve the way the activity is running. Some of the students are going to be better at the peer-questioning activity than others. By pairing students who are having problems with the activity with students who are doing well with the activity, you can make things run more smoothly.

   Probably the most important reason to vary the pairs is to allow students to see different perspectives. Students will benefit from associating with a variety of other students with different backgrounds and different outlooks. If they are paired with students who think too much as they do, the activity really doesn't teach

them anything; it simply reinforces what they think. Also, the questioners may be less likely to demand specific information and explicit examples for a position with which they agree. This point leads to another possible advantage in varying the pairings: often you stimulate better interchanges in the peer-questioning activity by pairing students who you know disagree. For instance, if a student is writing a paper in support of the current military build-up in the U.S., and you have a student who opposes that build-up, pair them; they will both benefit from the experience, and the papers you get are likely to be better organized, more specific, and more logical.

3. *Be flexible in using the peer-questioning cards.* The heuristic that the question cards provide is a *suggested* method of questioning; it is not engraved in stone. The questions are necessarily generic and abstract (particularly those in Set 1) so as to apply to all possible subjects. They work well with some classes, and not so well with others. They work well with some topics, and not so well with others. Therefore, you need to be alert and inventive. Listen to the students as they go through the activity. Are they getting anything from it, or are they simply going through the exercise because it seems to please you? More specifically, is their writing really better for their having used the activity? If not, you need to change something. The best place to start is with the cards. Maybe the questions aren't fitting the topics you have assigned. For instance, students might find the activity more difficult to use when asked to write a narrative than when assigned an expository essay. (And they probably should, since the peer-questioning exercise is designed to work with expository writing in particular.) So you are left with several options: you can make the topics fit the cards, or you can write your own cards. In other words, you can adapt the decks so that they apply to different types of writing. The important thing, though, is to make the exercise benefit the students' writing.
4. *Experiment with the activity.* The peer-questioning activity was originally designed to aid students in preparing to write persuasive essays, but its use need not be limited to just that. For example, if your students keep journals, a useful class exercise might be to ask them to share a piece of their writing with a partner for the purpose of honing their skills at writing journal entries that really say what they intend. Or they may want to work together to write an essay from one of their journal entries that they never intended to make public. For the latter exercise, it is a good idea to let the *students* choose which piece they will expand instead of dictating what they

will write. Let them choose the piece that impresses them. You are bound to get a better essay if the student cares about the topic.

Sometimes it is useful to have students run through the peer-questioning cards again after they have produced a draft—particularly the second set of cards. They may want to meet with the original partner briefly to check how closely they have adhered to the suggestions made at first. But it is also a good idea to let them get a fresh, new perspective on their draft by going through the activity with someone new before they write the final draft. One thing to watch for, however, is that the sessions do not turn into "grammar scans." Comments about grammar, usage, and such are good, and that kind of information should be exchanged at some point. But it will only interfere with the development of the paper if the writer is still in the revising stage. When the paper is ready to edit, let the students meet again briefly, but not in the roles of questioner and writer. They should meet the last time in the role of proofreader for each other's papers.

Peer-Questioning Cards—Set 1

The following questions were developed especially to help students develop detail and support, though they may be used to guide students to construct a full rhetorical context for their compositions. Students may use the questions in varying order and should see them as starting points for discussion.

Finding a topic: Did your instructor assign any particular subject area?

Examples: Write about a short story you read in class.

Write about an international crisis in this week's news.

Answer the question "What is the most noble reason for pursuing a college education?"

Finding a topic: Did your instructor assign any particular form of writing?

Examples: Compare and contrast two types of athletic games.

Define the idea of good sportsmanship in athletics.

Describe an important incident in your experience in athletics.

Finding a topic: Is there some topic in which you're especially interested because it is important to you?

Examples: Employment prospects for a business major

The history of place names in Georgia

The major factors that cause marital tensions

Finding a topic: Is there some topic that interests you either because you know a lot about it or because you'd like to learn more about it?

Examples: How styles of dress affect the impression you make on others

How the visual effects in popular science-fiction movies are achieved

How insurance companies make profits

Finding a topic: Did your instructor assign any particular audience for your writing?

Examples: Write for your classmates.

Write for your instructor, who is a college professor.

Write for a general cultivated readership.

Finding a topic: Did your instructor assign any particular purpose for writing?

Examples: Relate a story.

Explain a process for making some product.

Describe a scene.

Argue a position.

Dividing your topic (major premises): Does your topic break down into some sequence in time?

Examples: "First you choose the ingredients, then you turn on the oven, then you grease the pans . . ."

"First factories burn fossil fuels, then sulphur oxides are released into the atmosphere, then the oxides combine with water to form sulphuric acid, then the rain washes down the acid . . ."

Dividing your topic (major premises): Are some points more important than others?

Examples: "Atlanta is a center for transportation, high-technology industries, and finance." NOT "Atlanta is a center for transportation, high technology, and also has the Varsity restaurant, and also used to have a professional soccer team, but it went under because of poor support."

"We need to exercise our right to vote so that the best candidate can be selected, so that winning candidates will know how strongly the public supports their positions, and so that foreign enemies will not feel that our system of government is weak." NOT "We need to exercise our right to vote so that the best candidate can be selected, so that winning candidates can gauge their public support, and so that we can chat with our neighbors while standing in line."

Dividing your topic (major premises): What must be present for your subject to be what it is, and not something else?

Examples: "For a date to be truly successful, it must include good talk, some kind of tangible goal, and honest affection. If the talk is missing, you have an activity or a project, but not a date. If the goal is missing, you have a visit or a conversation. If honest affection is missing, you're stuck with a social obligation."

"It doesn't make sense to speak of classic rock-and-roll music. For music to be classic, it must be appreciated by people of many different ages and cultural backgrounds. It must be a vehicle which binds performers to a common tradition, but still allows them to express themselves. Classic music must be subtle enough to allow listeners to interpret it imaginatively."

Dividing your topic (major premises): How is your subject like something else and how is it different?

Examples: "Football is like war because it involves competition, strategy, courage, and loyalty. It is different from war because in football people participate by choice."

"Raising a child is not like painting a picture. In painting, an artist has total control over the creation, limited only by his or her technique. In parenting, the child is exposed to many influences that the parent cannot control. In both painting and parenting, however, the creator's ego is very much tied up in how people respond to the product."

Dividing your topic (major premises): What must your readers understand or believe before they understand or believe your main point?

Examples: "World War I came about because militaristic powers were arming themselves and had to find some outlet for their military power. The situation today is similar to that which preceded World War I. If the superpowers continue to arm themselves, we will inevitably be drawn into another worldwide conflict."

"There is good reason to believe that criminal behavior should be thought of as a biological disorder. An infant's sex is determined by chromosomes. Females have two X chromosomes, while males have one X and one Y chromosome. Geneticists have discovered that many violent prisoners have an extra Y chromosome. Their criminal behavior is preordained by their chromosomes."

Unifying your topic: Which of your subtopics are at the same level of abstraction or generality?

Examples: "The parts of the flower are the pistil, stamen, and petals." NOT "Flowers have pistils, stamens, and petals, and orchids are among the most difficult flowers to cultivate in northern climates."

"An inadequate high school education leaves graduates ill-equipped for the job market, for higher education, and for fulfilling personal growth." NOT "An inadequate high school education leaves graduates ill-equipped for the job market, for higher education, and is a common problem throughout America."

Making your meaning explicit (minor support): How do you know?

Example: "The 1965 Mustang is the most sought-after classic car."

"How do you know?"

"Well, I've gone to a bunch of classic car meets in Atlanta, one in Knoxville, and one in Jacksonville. Also, I read some classic car magazines. There are always more notices inquiring about '65 Mustangs than any other kind of car."

Making your meaning explicit (minor support): What do you mean? Can you define it?

Example: "Playing rock-and-roll music doesn't really require much talent."
"What do you mean by 'talent'?"
"Well, in jazz you need to improvise a lot more rhythms and chord progressions and be able to play in different keys. In classical music you need a great deal of control over technique if you're going to express yourself. So I guess I mean that playing rock-and-roll music doesn't require you to master a wide range of improvisational skills, and it also doesn't require much control over technique."

Making your meaning explicit (minor support): Can you give me an example?

Example: "In America, the military isn't supposed to run the government, but in reality it often does."
"For instance?"
"Just look at all the career military officers who have held high rank in the government. Ulysses Grant and Dwight Eisenhower became presidents after commanding our armies. Senators Denton of Alabama and Glenn of Ohio are career military officers."

Making your meaning explicit (minor support): What's it like? Can you describe it?

Example: "It happened on a very cold day."
"Can you describe the cold?"
"It was the kind of day that makes your nostrils freeze together after about thirty seconds outdoors; the kind of day when the ground is so frozen it feels like you're walking on concrete; the kind of day that your skin will stick to metal objects if you pick them up without gloves."

Making your meaning explicit (minor support): Can you tell me about an incident that illustrates your point? Can you give me an anecdote?

Example: "Everyone knows that dogs are loyal to their masters, but birds can be just as devoted."
"Do you know a story about a loyal bird?"
"Well, this is what happened to my brother when he lived in an apartment in Chicago. He couldn't have pets, but he had this pigeon that he would feed outside his window. Once he was awakened by a light tapping at his window . . ."

Making your meaning explicit (minor support): So what? What's the significance of that point? What conclusion do you draw?

Example: "When Atlantic City, New Jersey, first allowed casino gambling, all of the operators were legitimate. But now, five years later, much of the gambling is controlled by gangsters."
"So what? I thought your topic was about legalizing marijuana."
"That's my point. If we legalize marijuana, we may intend to have sales run by legitimate businesses. But sooner or later the mob will move in and take control."

Making your meaning explicit (minor support): Is it like something else that I can understand more readily? Can you give me an analogy, a metaphor, or a simile?

Example: "We can't just think about what's good for America. In the long run, we need to think about what's good for the entire world if America is going to prosper."
"Can you explain that to me in other terms?"
"The situation is like that of a person who runs an apple orchard. A road is being built, and the apple grower is glad that the road will be on her neighbor's property and not on her own. But the next season her apple crop is very poor because the bees that used to live in hives on the neighbor's land and pollinate the apple blossoms have been chased away by the road construction. The apple grower's trees can't bear fruit because of something that disturbed the bees next door. All the countries on Earth are interdependent economically and ecologically. We can't make the same mistake as the apple grower and think that our neighbor's problems won't affect us."

Making your meaning explicit (minor support): Did someone else with a great deal of credibility have something to say about your point? Can you cite an authority?

Example: "You don't have to know everything you're going to say when you start writing a paper."
"Who says? That's not what my ninth grade teacher told us."
"The poet and editor John Ciardi said so in an essay in the *Saturday Review* called 'On Writing and Bad Writing.' Ciardi, who after all really ought to know, said that writing was a process of groping and changing."

Note: You *must always* document someone else's ideas through footnotes or other means.

Making your meaning explicit (minor support): Did someone else say that especially well? Can you give me a quotation?

Example: "It seems a shame that the television news gives so much coverage to every single murder, but hardly any coverage to the drought and starvation in east Africa."
"People have probably been saying that for years."
"Well, it's like what Joseph Stalin, the Soviet dictator during World War II, said: 'When one person dies, that's a tragedy, but when a million people die, that's just a statistic.' "

Note: You *must always* document direct quotations through footnotes or other means.

Making your meaning explicit (minor support): Can you specify that in numbers? Can you give me a statistic?

Example: "Women in the job market earn a lot less than men."
"How much less? Is it just a small difference?"
"According to figures compiled by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, on the average women earn about 50 percent of what men earn. Of course, part of the reason for that discrepancy is that women hold a disproportionate number of low-paying jobs. But the same study shows that on the average if a man starts out at a salary of $20,000 a year, a woman can expect to make $18,000 a year starting out at the same job."

Note: You *must always* document the source of specific information that may not be widely known. Do this by means of footnotes or an equivalent method.

Peer-Questioning Cards—Set 2

The following set of questions was adapted expressly to help students draft assigned expository and argumentative essays. They can also be used for between-draft peer questioning as an aid to revision. The purpose of these questions is to help writers refine and execute their intended plans in order to produce a more polished and effective piece of writing.

1. What is the topic? What are you going to write about?
   Example: "Let's brainstorm a list of things we know enough about to write on."
   "Okay. You think out loud and I'll jot down what you say."
   "Let's see . . . surviving as a freshman at the university, the best night spot in town, body building, the ten all-time best movies, how to pass the Regent's exam . . ."

2. What are the constituent parts of your topic?
   Example: "You're writing about selecting a career. What major points do you plan to cover in your paper?"
   "Well, it's a big topic. I could write about how college majors, personal interests, or physical stamina affect career choice. Then there are also family businesses, personal values, travel opportunities, money factors and dozens of others . . ."

3. From your point of view, what are the three most significant constituent parts of your topic?
   Example: "All of that *does* relate to career choice. But you'd have to write a book to get it all in. What three major areas will you discuss? What three are most essential?"
   "I suppose personal interests, abilities, and prior experience relate most to career choice."

4. What evidence—statistical facts, examples, opinions of experts, etc.—can you give to support the constituent parts of your topic?

   Example: "How do you know that a 1967 Chevrolet Nova is a good investment?" "Chevrolet's production figures show that only 10,000 of that model and year of car were made. Experts cited in a recent issue of *Super Chevy* estimate that only 2,000 of these cars remain in service today. Examining the weight-to-power ratio shows the likelihood of faster acceleration . . ."

5. Do you anticipate any opposition?

   Example: "But the car is seventeen years old! Parts must be hard to find and expensive. You would have to spend a lot of time and money restoring the car. You would never get your money back when you try to resell the car . . ."
   "I see how that might be a first impression. But current issues of *Hemming's Motor News* quote prices from $10,000 to $4,000 for these cars. Auto clubs, swap meets, junkyards, and even Chevrolet dealers provide avenues for parts availability and competitive pricing . . ."

6. Where will you look for additional facts or evidence?

   Example: "Maybe teaching would be a good career choice. Where else can we find information?"
   "Let's check with the local school board to see what kind of job openings there are in this area. The university placement service might also tell us where teachers are needed and how much they get paid."

7. How will you begin?

   Example: "What can you do to capture the attention of your readers? What's an interesting opening for this paper?"
   "How about a leading question like 'Have you ever wondered how it feels to be internationally recognized?' Or maybe an assertive statement like 'I've found it: the best barbeque in town!' Or a catchy phrase . . ."

8. What information will you include in your introduction?

   Example: "The information in the introduction can help the reader anticipate what you'll cover in the piece. What do you want your reader to be ready for in this paper?"
   "The fact that there are many ways to stay in good shape—one of which is working out with weights. But weight workouts require careful supervision to be effective rather than harmful . . ."

9. What is your thesis?

   Example: It's helpful to your reader and for you as the writer to pinpoint the main focus of your piece in one informative sentence. What's that one sentence—the thesis—for this paper?"
   Well, I want to focus on the qualities needed for surviving the freshman year of college. Maybe my thesis could be something like 'Surviving the freshman year is a matter of wits, determination, and a healthy sense of humor.' "

10. Can you give five examples to illustrate your major thesis?

    Example: "What can you cite to back up your thesis that all politicians are crooks?"
    "Well, Richard Nixon was forced to resign, and so was his first vice president, and then there was . . ."

11. How are you going to end your theme?

    Example: "Looking ahead to the ending of the piece may help you fill in the gaps between the opening and the conclusion. What will you say in your conclusion?" "I want to reemphasize the main point that playing the stock market is not a game but a serious undertaking requiring experience, expert guidance, and a willingness to take reasonable chances . . ."

12. What will your last sentence say?

    Example: "Ending the paper well is just as important as opening well. How will you put some pizzaz in your ending?"
    "Since I've quoted experts, interviewed practitioners, and accounted for the main points of the opposition, I think I'll end with an assertive statement. Something like 'Not only is rock music a recognized form of expression, but it is definitely the musical mode of the future' might be a good final sentence for this piece . . ."

13. Who is your audience?

    Example: "Your topic is 'new options for utilizing the resources of our elderly or retired population.' Who might want to read about this topic?"
    "Retired people might read it to find out some options open to them for productively using their free time. Local service agencies may want to investigate ways the elderly can provide volunteer services for clients. Relatives may want ideas for cheering up a lonely grand-aunt . . ."

14. Which ideas will your audience probably accept? Which will they reject?

    Example: " 'Aging' can be a touchy subject. You want favorable responses. What will your audience find reasonable and acceptable?"
    "We all know that retired people have years of valuable experience in different areas that they can share with us. Many older people have successfully coped with personal losses, serious illnesses, or the changing values of society; they can help us learn strategies for dealing with similar problems . . ."
    "I agree that those are positive points. What can you predict as obvious audience turn-offs? What will your audience reject?"
    "No one likes to be referred to as 'useless,' 'old,' or 'probably senile.' I'll need to avoid negative or sexist terms. Stereotypes aren't acceptable either . . ."

15. What might be some good titles for your theme?

Example: "Considering your entire piece, what title could you give it? Does the title need to be serious or humorous? Would a short question work? Or do you need a more formal title?"

"I have several possibilities you can help me choose among. How about one of the following:

Investing with Care
Money: Don't Leave Home without It
How To Be a Millionaire by Age Thirty
The Stock Market: A How-to Guide
Never Say 'Crash' Again . . ."

16. Whose opinions are you expressing—yours or those of experts?

Example: "What reasons do you have for saying that our educational system needs some innovative changes to meet our future needs?"

"In their recent books and reports, Boyer, Goodlad, and the President's Commission on Excellence in Education have all made specific recommendations for educational change. Specifically, they suggest a longer school day, more homework . . ."

Topic-Sculpting Activities

In topic sculpting, students practice a form of impromptu speaking. They are challenged to work with topics that are supplied to them rather than topics of their own choosing. Students focus on discovering some way of refining and redirecting the assigned topics so they are workable and personally meaningful. With only brief preparation, students present an oral composition before the class. The composition can be followed up by asking students to identify in writing the thesis they discovered and to outline the structure that emerged in their talk. Topic assignments progress from relatively concrete and familiar subjects to the relatively abstract.

Logistics

Using index cards, the instructor creates three sets of topics (see "Sample Topics"). Each deck should contain twenty-five to fifty topics. Early in the term, Deck #1, which contains relatively concrete and familiar topics (e.g., "driving in rush-hour traffic"), is used. As the term progresses, the instructor provides increasingly more abstract topics (e.g., "cars," and yet later on, "transportation"). Each student participating in topic sculpting on any given day (probably no more than six students per day; this activity is not intended to fill an entire class meeting) draws a card at random. If the student is disappointed with that choice, only one redraw is permitted. After all, the point of the exercise is to help students learn how to impose their own points of view on what are otherwise neutral assignments. Students are sent out of the classroom (or to a relatively isolated area of the classroom) to think about their topics for five minutes. Their instructions (see "Rationale for Students") urge them to think about what their unique perspective on the topic might be and how they might communicate that perspective to their classmates in a talk. They are urged to use the talk as an opportunity for exploring new ways to think about the topic.

When they return to the classroom, students sit in pairs at the front, facing the class. This constitutes a semi-formal speaking situation since it is not as threatening as a typical public-speaking situation, yet it is clear that the students at the front "have the floor." They are expected to produce extended monologues with some degree of coherence. Each of the two students presents a talk of about three minutes. (That

usually amounts to a bit over three hundred words). The other students may clap to express appreciation for each speaker's efforts, but no other feedback or critique is offered at this time. As a follow-up, students turn in on the following day an informal outline that identifies the central thesis and supporting points that emerged in their talks. Later, the outline is developed into a full essay.

Sample Topics

Deck #1: Concrete, familiar

People who drive Corvettes (or Volkswagen Bugs, or Cadillacs)
Computers in the lives of college students
Living at home with my parents
Junk food in the diets of American youths
This year's most popular music
.
.
.

Deck #2: Intermediate abstraction, generality

Cars and their drivers
Technology in education
Relationships between parents and children
Junk food
Popular music
.
.
.

Deck #3: Abstract

Transportation
Technology
Parents
Nutrition
Music
.
.
.

Rationale for Students

Students have fairly rigid expectations of what it means to give a speech, and those expectations are likely negative. In addition, many basic writers prefer well-defined tasks. But the topic-sculpting activity asks students to take responsibility for defining their own task, and it asks them to use talk in an exploratory way—to discover meaning and focus as much as to communicate that meaning to an audience. The following instructions, incorporating the analogy of the sculptor imposing a vision on a medium with infinite potentialities, can be helpful.

> Sometimes the hardest part of writing is figuring out what to write about. Even when we're assigned a topic, we need to figure out exactly how to approach the topic, how to narrow it down, or what aspect of the topic to focus on. Some people would say we need to "own" the topic, or "get an angle" on the subject.
>
> In this sense, the writer's job is similar to the task a sculptor faces when he or she first sets out to chisel away at a rough piece of stone. The sculptor must transform that rough stone into a statue that people will be able to recognize and understand. The stone itself has no meaning. But each sculptor looks at the stone and figures out how he or she will create something meaningful out of it. No two sculptors will see the stone in quite the same way, and no two sculptors will set about their work of chipping, chiseling, and smoothing in quite the same way. Remember also that when the sculptor takes the first few blows at the stone, he or she doesn't yet know the exact form that the statue will take. The sculptor "discovers" the final details of the statue as the work progresses. But experienced sculptors have faith even when they first see the blank chunk of rock that those final details will come to them as they work.
>
> In this activity you will be assigned a topic. But that topic is much like a rough chunk of stone. And like the sculptor working with stone, it will be your job to figure out what you will do with the topic, and in what direction you will take it. You must find your own personally meaningful way to work with the topic.
>
> After thinking about the topic for about five minutes, you will present a short speech to the class. Your talk should be a unique expression of what you find important or interesting in the topic. You can be humorous or serious, use personal anecdotes or logical reasoning, and organize your ideas in a sequential order, in compare/contrast order, or in any other order. Don't worry if you haven't "fleshed out" all the details before you begin speaking; many of these will come to you as you talk. Of course, you will need to speak loudly and clearly enough for everyone in the class to understand you, but your talk isn't really supposed to be a formal speech. Instead, it's a chance for you to talk out your ideas and show your own particular perspective on a topic.

Suggestions for Classroom Use

1. *Model the process.* Even though students will be seated with a partner when they present their talks, it is always threatening to be the sole focus of a group's attention. You must show that you are willing to take the same risk. You must risk showing your students that you are not always infallible. Draw a topic from the deck of cards just as you will ask your students to do. Think out loud as you figure out how you will approach the topic. Show them the myriad of possibilities that run through your mind. (You also may end up showing them how everyone gets stalled from time to time.) Tell the class your reasons (feasibility, personal interest, prior knowledge) for choosing one approach to the topic over the others. You might demonstrate, for example, how a three-minute talk can be organized around a single unfolding metaphor or personal anecdote. Or you might demonstrate how three subpoints sandwiched between an introduction and a conclusion also comprise a workable structure (but by no means the only structure). You might also provide a running commentary as you deliver your talk in which you reveal the instantaneous decisions and revisions that give shape to your emerging oral composition. You might present a three-minute talk on a topic and then turn around and present a second talk on the same topic in order to demonstrate alternative approaches. Finally, using your talk, provide the students with an example of the informal outline of the central thesis and supporting details you want them to hand in. As a further extension, you might ask the students to prepare an outline as you talk; then they can compare their outlines with yours.
2. *Be sensitive to communication apprehension.* Many students—some experts estimate as many as one in five—experience generalized apprehension about interacting with others. This is more than stage fright. Stage fright is a normal and even healthy response to a stressful situation. But communication apprehension can be far more dysfunctional.

   Occasionally, students simply cannot bring themselves to speak before a group. They should not be forced to do so. Handle the matter discreetly. A form of systematic desensitization can be used to help ease communication apprehension. In this technique, students first present their talks conversationally to a partner. Then three sets of partners join together to present the same talks within a small-group environment. Finally, each student presents the same talk a third time to the entire class, seated at the front of the room

with his or her partner. Besides reducing apprehension about communicating, this exercise has the added benefit of demonstrating for students how they intuitively shift their style in a progressively more formal direction as they address increasingly larger and more diverse audiences. Its major disadvantage is that it is very time-consuming.

3. *Make this activity a positive experience for students: don't evaluate.* For most students, public speaking has always been an occasion for evaluation (usually for having their deficiencies pointed out to them). Let this activity be an ungraded assignment. If students are working for a grade in this exercise it will militate against the activity's value in promoting exploratory talk. Instead, offer some vaguely positive reinforcement (e.g., "That was good. Thank you") or ask a follow-up question after each student speaks. Students will be rooting for each other and will want to express their support. Although it might seem contrived, encourage them to applaud after each speaker. Give credit especially to the first students who are willing to pioneer this activity for the rest of the class.

   Although you won't be evaluating individual performances, you can still help the class derive criteria for adequate oral compositions. After a number of students have presented their talks, perhaps after the first round of speaking, ask students what it is that makes for especially interesting or effective talks. They may come up with ideas like "the ones that made a point," "the ones that had ideas hanging together instead of just piled on top of each other," "the ones that gave examples of what they were talking about," or "the ones that made you see a worn-out idea in a new way." You can remind the class of their self-generated criteria before they begin the second round of topic-sculpting impromptus.

4. *Encourage students to listen.* It is difficult to talk when no one is listening. Help students understand that just as speakers have responsibilities (e.g., to be intelligible, to make a point), so do listeners. Besides the obvious courtesies of remaining silent and nondisruptive, you might mention the role of nonverbal feedback. Eye contact, a posture conveying interest, an open facial expression—all send out subtle yet potent messages supporting or discouraging the speaker. You might ask two or three students to provide each speaker with a sentence or two of written feedback. Rotate this assignment throughout the class so that the same students aren't always writing. Encourage students to try to analyze how each speaker addresses his or her topic. They might pick up some tech-

niques to emulate or experiment with. Indeed, this might be an opportune time to provide students with some deliberate instruction in listening, for the instruction is itself a powerful calisthenic for building skills in cooperative discourse.

Forensic-Discussion Activities

In a forensic-discussion activity, the class divides into two large groups or teams and debates a question on some policy or situation. To promote movement toward a detached, technical appreciation of argument, each student identifies (1) the type of argument used by the preceding speaker from the other team, and (2) the role within the policy debate of that speaker. The students identify these features before being allowed to add their own comments. Midway through the class period, the two groups switch positions (physically and argumentatively) and take on advocacy of the point of view they had previously been opposing. Persuasive writing assignments generally follow each forensic discussion.

Logistics

Give the class a question of policy phrased as a debatable resolution (see "Sample Resolutions" on p. 50). For example, the statement might read "Resolved, that the police should be able to stop and search anyone they suspect might be dangerous even if they have no specific evidence that the person has committed a crime." Divide the class into two groups and assign one group the task of supporting the proposed policy and the other the task of defending the status quo. (To thwart arguments about position assignments, perhaps now would be a good time to assure the students that they will have an opportunity to debate the other side of the issue later.) Students may have in front of them during the debate a copy of the two guides, "Types of Arguments" and "Roles of Arguments in Policy Debates," which are included at the end of this chapter (pp. 47–49).

First the Pro group begins, followed by the Con group. Before the speaker for the opposition can give opening comments, he or she must first identify the type and role of argument used by the Pro speaker who began the debate. The rest of the debate follows, with each group alternating in turn. The instructor will serve as referee to insure that each group alternates properly and that each speaker identifies the type and role of argument used by the preceding speaker. After approximately fifteen or twenty minutes, the two groups stand

up and actually exchange sides of the room. At this point, the debate starts over, with each group advocating the position that it had been opposing. The debate concludes after fifteen or twenty minutes more, and writing assignments are given.

Rationale for Students

Students may benefit from a rationale such as the following one:

> Most of us have opinions about almost everything. (In fact, if we don't have opinions, we probably haven't taken the time to think through any issues.) It's important, however, to do more than just assert an opinion. Support and reasoning are crucial in argumentative writing, for unlike arguing face-to-face with an opponent—where we can use gestures and expressions that convey strong feelings—an argumentative theme is won or lost on the strength of the written text. Forensic discussion helps us learn to be analytical about our reasoning so that we can better support our points of view when we do write.

Suggestions for Classroom Use

1. *Model the process.* As has been emphasized before, all of us have some degree of reticence at the start of something new. Remember this fact applies to your students, too. If at all possible, get a colleague to help you model the activity. Despite the fact that the two of you will be doing all the arguing (in the actual debate, group members will take turns arguing), the students will get a good idea of how the activity should flow. Begin by explaining the rules of the activity, making certain that the students understand what follows what. Perhaps you and your colleague will want to use a prepared script that clearly illustrates or gives attention to the type of argument and role of that argument. For example, my opposing response to my colleague's proposal for a policy change could go something like this: "Ellen, your use of examples is good, but those examples aren't significant enough to warrant the need for a new policy." Here the focus is on the words *examples* and *need.* I have recognized that my opponent used examples as support for her essay, and I have identified them as such. Also, by saying "not significant enough to warrant the need," I have identified the role of my opponent's example argument in the debate. She was arguing the "Need" role (see p. 48). After you and your colleague have run through the activity for ten to fifteen minutes, exchange sides and positions just as the students are expected to do. Then proceed for ten to fifteen minutes more.

If you find that the students are weak in identifying the type of arguments used, you may want them to keep a checklist. Each time you or your colleague begins a comment, ask the students to jot down the type of argument and role that they think the two of you are using. After a session, compare your assessment of what you and your colleague actually did with what the students picked up on. In this way, you'll insure that this information is learned and that the students see how the activity should progress.

2. *Give careful consideration to the composition of the two student groups.* It's possible that in both groups there are students who are perfectly content to sit back and let other, more enthusiastic and vocal members of the group do all the research and actual debating. These students will remain unproductive within what George (1984) refers to as the Leaderless Group. You will need to intervene here, possibly even to the point of reassigning the members of both groups. If you must make group assignments, be sure to achieve a good mix of vocal and less-vocal students, as well as a mix of students who are self-starting and will do the necessary research along with those who need prodding to get to the library.

   You might suggest that each team choose a captain to be in charge of the efforts of the group as it prepares for the debate. Making sure that every person on the team has a research point to investigate and that every member has a time to speak during the debate are just two of several duties that the captain may have. Everybody does the necessary research to argue the team's position, but the captain may serve as a "ramrod" to get the work done.

3. *Allow for adequate research time.* Keep in mind that students who lack extensive prior knowledge about debatable issues of policy (i.e., most basic writers) will definitely need time to do research if they are going to argue with any effectiveness. If the question of policy which is being used is a sophisticated or complex one, students will need more time. Initially, you may want to have an informal brainstorming session with the class to generate a list of resources and information centers that may be available to the team members. For instance, while researching a policy such as the police's authority to stop and search suspects, the students may discover law enforcement agencies, legal aid centers, police training academies, and chapters of the American Bar Association which would be willing to supplement the information available at the campus library. In one actual case, a group of students obtained the report of an actual stop-and-search incident provided by a police agency.

Preparing for a forensic discussion is also a fine opportunity to acquire some library research skills. Be sure that your students are able to use the library. Take students for a tour of the reference room and walk them through the steps to take in researching an issue (the reference librarian might be willing to do this, too). Familiarize students with such standard sources as the *Reader's Guide to Periodical Literature*, the *Humanities Index*, and the *Essay and General Literature Index*. Since forensic discussion is somewhat of a competitive activity, students will be especially motivated to unearth high-quality research materials.

4. *Make sure the debate follows the rules set up in the logistics outline.* If the question of policy is a controversial one, and if the students have done their research and have powerful points, there may be a tendency to forget or forgo the established protocol set up for this activity, especially if the arguments become heated. You must referee to make sure that the groups alternate in turn. You must also insure that each new speaker, before commenting, first identifies the type of argument and the role of the argument used by the preceding speaker.

   After the forensic-debate activity has been used several times and you are sure that your students can identify the various types and roles of arguments, you may want to release the students from having to make these identifications. In actuality, you will probably be less concerned about the accuracy of the students' identifications and more concerned that they make the effort to be analytical about the reasoning before presenting their own views.

5. *Persuasive writing assignments should follow each of the debates.* Immediately after a debate, have the students free-write to clear up their ideas from the fray that may have occurred during the debate. This writing allows the students to put their ideas and the ideas and opinions brought up by the opposition into some perspective. Later, students can write a more planned argumentative theme that allows them to use all of the information obtained from their own research as well as insights discovered by looking at the topic from the angle of other students.

Types of Arguments

1. CAUSE AND EFFECT: Something is the cause of something else. If we observe an effect, we can be pretty sure that the cause is responsible. If we observe the cause, we can be pretty sure that the effect will follow.

   Example: If we legalize marijuana, more people will become hooked on hard drugs, since smoking marijuana causes people to try hard drugs. After all, once you've broken one law against drug use, it's easy to break another. Also, marijuana gives us bad judgment, so it's harder to resist the temptation of hard drugs.

2. EXAMPLE: What is true in a particular example (or examples) is true in general.

   Example: If more people use marijuana, we will see more tragic deaths from drug overdoses. After all, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, and John Belushi all died from drug-related causes.

3. ANALOGY: What is true in one case will be true in another case that is similar.

   Example: We should legalize marijuana because we are just wasting money trying to prohibit it; we'll never be successful in wiping it out. After all, think about the period during the 1920s when alcoholic beverages were prohibited. The government eventually had to return to allowing consumption of alcohol because Prohibition simply wasn't working.

4. SIGN: When two things usually occur together, if we observe one of those things, we can be pretty sure that the other exists.

   Example: When we allow marijuana use to go unchecked, we are allowing our civilization to fall apart. Whenever large numbers of people pursue pleasure that has no constructive effect, that's a sure sign that civilization is going downhill.

5. AUTHORITY: If an expert in a certain area says something, it's probably true.

   Example: The district attorney of Blue Earth County agrees that we should legalize marijuana. She has prosecuted a large number of cases involving marijuana possession, and she concludes that these court cases are a waste of the taxpayers' money.

Roles of Arguments in Policy Debates

Supporting the new proposal: If you are supporting the new policy you must show three things:

1. NEED: There is a problem, and the existing policy does not solve it.

   Example: Drug smuggling is a major problem in the United States. Many violent crimes are committed by criminals engaged in drug smuggling. Stiff laws which make possession of marijuana illegal are not stopping the drug smugglers.

2. SOLUTION: The new policy would help to solve the problem.

   Example: If marijuana were no longer illegal, then bringing marijuana into the U.S. would no longer be a criminal activity. Legitimate businesses would take over, and violent criminals would no longer be involved.

3. PRACTICALITY: The new policy can be implemented and would not create new problems that might be just as troubling.

   Example: It would take a simple act of Congress to legalize marijuana. So many people use marijuana now that there probably wouldn't be much increase in usage. Besides, even if more people did use marijuana, the situation wouldn't be as bad as all the drunk drivers on the road who use alcohol.

Attacking the new proposal (supporting the existing policy): If you are attacking the new policy and defending the policy which already exists, you must show three things:

1. NO NEED: The existing policy does a good job of controlling the problem.

   Example: The existing laws which make marijuana illegal have a powerful effect. These laws keep most youngsters from running around intoxicated all the time. Most youngsters who do use marijuana use it sparingly because it is pretty expensive, and they are also afraid of getting into trouble with the law.

(continued)

2. NEW POLICY WOULDN'T WORK: Even if there were a big problem, the proposed policy wouldn't solve it.

   Example: Even if marijuana were legalized, we would still have the most dangerous kind of drug smuggling. Highly addictive drugs like cocaine and heroin would still attract the most violent criminals.

3. NEW POLICY WOULD CREATE PROBLEMS: If we adopted the proposed policy, we would face a whole new set of serious problems.

   Example: If marijuana were legalized, we certainly wouldn't allow young kids to use it, any more than we allow young kids to drink alcohol. We would need a whole new set of regulations and a whole new set of police procedures to make sure that young kids don't get hold of marijuana. Keeping alcohol out of their hands is enough of a problem. Why add another one?

Sample Resolutions

The following are resolutions advocating new policies. They are all possible topics for discussion and follow-up essays.

- Theaters that show sexually explicit films should be shut down.
- The power to send American soldiers into combat in undeclared wars should be taken away from the President and given to Congress.
- Undergraduate students should have the right to create their own programs of study; there should be no college regulations about required courses.
- Police should be able to stop and search anyone they suspect might be dangerous even if they have no specific evidence that the person has committed a crime.
- There should be no violent episodes allowed during prime television viewing hours.
- People who send their children to private elementary schools and high schools should be given a break on their taxes.
- Students should be able to decide which college faculty members are hired or fired.
- Scholarships for college study should be based only on academic ability, not on financial need or athletic ability.
- Every healthy American male and female should be required to spend two years in military service immediately following high school graduation.
- Courses in music appreciation for high school and college students should be about popular music like rock-and-roll, jazz, and soul music.

Writing across the Curriculum: Using Oral Communication Activities to Facilitate Writing outside the Composition Classroom

Recent programs in writing across the curriculum have established that instructors in the content-area courses face problems very similar to those of composition teachers. Their students also have difficulty making inferences about others' thoughts, beliefs, and knowledge. As a result, these students' writings for the class, as well as their contributions to class discussions, are marked by egocentric qualities. Students rely solely on their opinions and present arguments rife with undeveloped observations and undersupported assertions. Very often, students writing in content-area classes are reluctant to or incapable of seeing views other than their own on any controversial issue.

Using the Role-Switching Activity

The role-switching activity can be useful in introducing new and difficult concepts to students and in helping them to see the complexity of an issue. In other words, the role-switching activities can be used as an orienting exercise in all kinds of classes, especially in history, psychology, sociology, science, and political science.

However, using the role switching in a content-area classroom rather than in a composition classroom does pose some particular difficulties. First, in composition classes, instructors will present role-switching scenarios involving dilemmas that are either controversies constantly discussed in the media or else ethical controversies that are basic to the students' culture (gun control, smoking, abortion, capital punishment). The assumption is that students already have some background knowledge that they bring with them to the scenario. In the content-area classroom, however, the issues are often new, complex, and confusing. For example, students may have no difficulty enacting a role-switching activity dealing with creationism versus evolution because they have been aware of the issue for years. The possible roles involved—creationist, evolutionist, minister, teacher, politician, parent, and so forth—are basically familiar to them. In contrast, the students in a science class might have real problems enacting a role-switching activity about the ethical issues of scientists' ability to create life through genetic engineering. Some of the roles here—businessman, geneticist, environmentalist, biologist—might be so unfamiliar that the students would find it impossible to view the dilemma from one or more of the characters' perspectives.

Such problems are controllable but require careful planning on the

part of the instructor. Scenarios must be created so that all the roles are accessible to all the students; otherwise, the students won't learn from the experience. One way to make the roles more accessible is to generalize the scenarios so that the issues stay the same but the roles become characters with whom the students would more readily identify. For example, a scenario created for a civics class examining the effect of tax evasion on society may work better, particularly at first, if the dilemma actually deals with the underlying issues: is it right to lie because you feel a rule is unfair? Who gets hurt when people cheat? What if people obeyed only the laws with which they agreed? These issues can be examined using scenarios that involve everyday life, and can serve as a springboard for future activities. In other words, lead the students to their destination gradually!

Another problem in using role switching in a content-area class is that students may dismiss the activity as "fun time." The exercises are likely to be different from what they are used to, and the students are just as likely to feel threatened because these exercises *are* different. One way of getting around the problem is to tie the activities to an event that the students are used to in the course. For example, the first use of role switching may be to review material already covered in preparation for a quiz, or, even better, for an out-of-class paper. The students can see the benefits of the activities more immediately if the activities are used to prepare for a task they see as meaningful.

Using the Peer-Questioning Activity

The peer-questioning activity is an excellent way to improve students' writing, both on exams and in out-of-class papers. Instructors may find it useful to allow their students a "dry run" on essay exam questions. For example, a week before the exam the instructor may want to give the students a list of several possible essay topics, allowing the students to write responses. The peer-questioning activity can help the students flesh out their essays as well as serve as a review of the information to be tested. Likewise, the activity may prove useful in improving the quality of papers that students write outside of class. On the whole, students are good editors of *other people's* writing, and there is no reason why both they and the instructor should not benefit from having their work read by others before it is graded. The students will produce fuller, more cogent essays, and the instructor's work load will be cut dramatically. But, most importantly, the students will learn how to behave as readers who make demands on the text and as writers who meet those demands in the text.

Using the Topic-Sculpting Activity

Like peer questioning, topic sculpting can be an excellent way to improve students' writing on exams and other class writing assignments. Instructors may find that the activity works well when used to allow students to "sculpt" topics which may appear on tests or be assigned as class writing assignments, thus sharpening their own perspectives and, at the same time, sharing those perspectives so that their ideas enrich and are enriched by the ideas of others.

The topic-sculpting activity may also prove beneficial in introducing new concepts, particularly abstract and complex ones. The activity can serve as a quick way for the teacher to find out how much the students already know, and it may show the students how uninformed their opinions on a subject are. Many students hold opinions they have never really examined, and this activity can help them realize that sometimes they really don't know why they feel the way they do.

Finally, topic sculpting works well in conjunction with peer questioning. Since the students may be paired in the oral presentations of the topic sculpting, moving from that situation to serving as questioner and responder in the production of a written draft will seem a logical sequence. And since the students were with each other from the moment each other's ideas began to emerge, they will be better prepared to bring form and substance to the written product.

Using the Forensic-Discussion Activity

The forensic-discussion activity may be used to introduce students to new material and ideas. This activity seems especially well-suited for use in content-area courses because the students will have a textbook which provides them with some background information and because the topics can be designed to be closely tied to important concepts on which the students can easily find more material in the library. In fact, the content-area classroom has a distinct advantage over the composition classroom in this regard. The topics in the composition classroom often deal with broad ethical or moral controversies which are not always readily supplemented by the school library. By using forensic discussions to introduce new material, the instructor will help the students to develop a store of information they can build on during the course.

Forensic discussion can also be used as a follow-up exercise to the role-switching activity. Often a situation for a debate can be generalized from the dilemma enacted in the role switching. For example, several possible topics for forensic-discussion activities might be developed

from a role-switching activity involving the rights of anthropologists to study people who have never been exposed to the modern world: are an individual's rights to privacy sacred? Where do one person's rights end and another person's rights begin? Is it good for a society to be pluralistic, maintaining the uniqueness of its subcultures? In other words, the forensic-discussion activity allows students to move from the particular to the general—to abstract what they learn.

Finally, forensic discussion can be a valuable tool in preparing students for exams. The activity may serve to provide students with a summary of information covered or as a departure point for an essay-type test question. If the discussion is planned carefully, the instructor can be sure the students have enough background to "manipulate" facts to develop their arguments on the exam. The discussion should not make the argument for them, but it should provide information to back up an argument.

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William M. Dodd is an assistant professor of English/reading in the Developmental Studies Department at Augusta College. He has coauthored, with John Presley, *Breakthrough: From Reading to Writing* and *Essential Reading Skills.* Dodd also contributed to the *Longman Bibliography of Composition and Rhetoric: 1984–85.* He has made frequent presentations at meetings of the Conference on College Composition and Communication and the Southeastern Conference on English in the Two-Year College.

Talking into Writing

Exercises for Basic Writers

Authors Donald Rubin and William Dodd open this monograph by noting that remediation programs for basic writers "are remarkable for the persistence with which they adhere to instructional techniques of proven impotence." Rubin and Dodd point out that it is the rhetorical demands of composition, rather than ignorance of writing conventions, that pose the greatest problem for basic writers. Many basic writers come from predominantly oral-based cultures whose style of discourse is radically different from the essayist style taught in the schools. However, talking itself, in the form of oral communication exercises, can promote writing proficiency in three ways: by serving as an *accompaniment* at stages in the writing process, as an *adjunct* to writing by providing a bridge between dialogue and written monologue, and as a *calisthenic* for developing the cognitive processes underlying writing proficiency.

The Practice section of this monograph presents instructions and materials for four types of speech exercises designed to develop composition skill: role switching, peer questioning, topic sculpting, and forensic discussion. A final section discusses the use of these exercises across the curriculum.

Says one teacher, "This book does many things well. It provides a theoretical base supported by research and provides a variety of classroom experiences that should appeal to both students and teachers. The book will also appeal not only to college audiences but to junior high and secondary teachers as well."

References and a selected bibliography of both secondary and college items are included.

64